

Analysis of Common Problems in the Interview Section of Oral English Competition in Chinese Vocational Colleges and Corresponding Strategies

Xiaoli Hu

Jiangsu Maritime Institute, Jiangsu, Nanjing 211170, China

ABSTRACT. *Oral English Competition is one of the most important competitions in Chinese vocational colleges. This paper first analyses common problems in the interview section: poor listening ability resulting in mental tension, limited real-life knowledge and poor oral discourse ability, lack of micro language skills and insufficient body language and professionalism. Then it puts forward several corresponding strategies: strengthening listening abilities, expanding contestants' scope of real-life knowledge, paying attention to contestants' micro language skills as well as enriching contestants' body language and professionalism.*

KEYWORDS: *oral English competition; interview; problem; strategy*

1. Introduction

1.1 Content

The competition includes "presentation", "interview" and "debate". The specific contents, requirements, time limit and assessment standards are as follows:

1.2 Presentation

Contestants are required to choose a statistical chart or picture reflecting the business development or social and economic hot issues of any industry/enterprise^[1]. According to the instructions given, on the basis of fully understanding the contents of the chart or the picture, oral description and explanation are required. The abilities of the contestants to understand the commonly used charts within a limited period of time, grasp the main information provided by the charts, and make oral presentation are assessed. This section lasts for 3 minutes and the score is based on contestants' content, logic, language and manners.

1.3 Interview

Contestants are required to select an advertisement, poster, etc. and play one of the roles according to the requirements, and have a one-on-one question and answer session with the question master. The topics involve modern social life, economy and the application of new technology. It is meant to test the contestants' oral communication ability with English speaking people in the workplace. The contestants are required to have strong listening and speaking skills and understand the latest developments in social life, economic and technological progress. This section lasts for 3 minutes and the score is based on contestants' content, response, language and manners.

1.4 Debate

According to the results of the draw, the contestants will be divided into the pros and cons, who will have an impromptu debate on a certain social hot issue. First, the pro side will make a statement for 2 minutes, then the con side will make a statement for 2 minutes, and then the pros and cons will have a 3-minute free debate. The score will be based on contestants' content, logic, response, language and manners.

2. Common Problems in the Interview Section

2.1 Poor Listening Ability resulting in Mental Tension

In the provincial competition, some contestants lose more points in the interview section. The fundamental reason is that they can't understand the question master and can't quickly organize their information. When the question master asks the next question, the contestants are still stuck in the previous question, resulting in mental tension. Therefore, they are unable to answer correctly, or stand on the stage nervously unable to speak, or speak very fast but not articulately. These factors have seriously affected their performance.

2.2 Limited Real-life Knowledge and Poor Oral Discourse Ability

Most contestants are capable of dealing with the general daily communication, but when facing some deep-seated problems or topics that they have not touched on, they will inevitably have meaningless and repetitive sentences, and can not express themselves accurately. There is no logic and order in the language of their statement. The order of narration is reversed, they can not speak fluently and all kinds of issues such as mantra, pause, keeping repeating will arise. If they don't pay attention to the common social and cultural hot issues, they can't fully develop their language proficiency.

2.3 Lack of Micro Language Skills

In the oral competition, micro language skills are mainly reflected in students' pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. The contestants' pronunciation and intonation will leave an overall impression on the panel of judges. The richness and accuracy of words show the contestants' vocabulary, and the sentences they say reflect the foundation of their English language. The contestants' actual performance in the competition indicate that nearly half of the contestants' pronunciation and intonation are not authentic and accurate, and their mastery of sentence patterns also needs lots of improvement.

2.4 Insufficient Body Language and Professionalism

In the workplace, good professional quality, the use of polite language and appropriate gesture body language is particularly important. In the competition, most of the contestants' positions are very rigid. Many of them fail to stand on the center of the stage, and then do not make any movements. There is no gesture, etc. in the interview process. They do not know some response in body language required by the role. They also need eye contact and body language when speaking or presenting their work.

3. Strategies for the Interview

3.1 Strengthening Listening Abilities

It is of vital importance for contestants to be able to understand the question master in the first place. Otherwise, the interview will fail to continue smoothly and effectively. There are many ways for contestants to improve their listening abilities, such as watching English movies, listening to BBC or VOA news, etc.. More importantly, it is efficient for contestants to communicate directly with native speakers if possible^[2].

3.2 Expanding Contestants' Scope of Real-life Knowledge

The interview is mostly product poster, recruitment advertisement, activity arrangement, rental car advertisement, etc. It is meant to let contestants sell a certain service or product. Teachers should help contestants expand their knowledge in these areas. For example, if the flyer is about automobile service, teachers should explain to contestants what kind of services will be included and what should be paid attention to. To some extent, this section is quite challenging in the sense that it requires contestants professional knowledge in many fields and the problem lies in that contestants lack such kind of expertise and sometimes they do not know what to say instead of how to say it^[3].

3.3 Paying Attention to Contestants' Micro Language Skills

Pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar are fundamental micro skills contestants should master. Actually, these skills are not easy to change in a short period of time^[4]. Therefore, when selecting students for the competition, vocational colleges should choose those with good pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. In this way, the following training can be concentrated on improving contestants' more advanced skills. Practice makes perfect. Only through lots of practice can contestants improve their skills in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar.

3.4 Enriching Contestants' Body Language and Professionalism

Teachers should pay attention to the training of contestants' etiquette and professional quality, such as gesture, standing position, micro expression and other body languages, because everything should be related to the role, which also reflects professional quality.

First of all, the most important thing is to guide the contestants into the role. Interview is not a simple question & answer, which will only leads to low scores. Contestants need to figure out what the role will act in real-life situation. In the interview, there are often supposition that the contestant is an agent, a salesman, an organizer of an event to answer questions from the question master^[5].

Then, in the process of preparation, we should train the contestants to be aware that some frequent questions concerning to person, time, address as well as contact information. Usually such questions will be asked in this section: Hello. I'm interested in an Open House event you are organizing. May I know the name of the event?/ What is the event about?/ When will it take place?/ Where will it be held?/ I'm from China, can I participate in it? The more accurate the answer, the faster the reaction, the higher the score. This is a process of communication and interaction.

4. Conclusion

Interview is the most tricky section in the oral English competition as it involves not only contestants' English proficiency, but also their real-life knowledge in various fields. Besides, contestants should be well-prepared for the tension on the stage and interact with the question master. In spite of the difficulties, through enough practice and efficient training contestants will be able to improve their overall performance and act like real professionals.

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